The Soviet Occupation of North Korea

The Soviet occupation of the North had the effect of completely wiping out all remnants of the former colonial order (Japan), which had existed for forty years, in a matter of months. All collaborators of the Japanese were expelled from positions of power. In contrast with the American occupation, the North lacked a formal military occupational structure. Rather, the Soviets endeavoured to co-operate and work with the already established "people's committees" instead of imposing a military occupational government on the North.

Involving the various "people's committees" in the decision making process, the Soviets implemented a policy of land reform that ended centuries of landlord dominance in Korean society. Those landlords that were deemed to have been collaborators of the Japanese occupation had considerably more of their land confiscated and redistributed to the general populace. Korean landlords that were not accused of collaboration with the Japanese were able, under the new land reform, to keep enough land to live off of. Unlike the land reforms in China that would occur after the CCP victory over the Guomindang, the land redistribution in northern Korea under Soviet auspices were carried out with little violence. None of the brutal village denunciations, mock trials, and public executions of landlords, that were such a common sight throughout China, took place in the North after liberation. In addition to land confiscation and redistribution, other steps were made including the nationalisation of the largest industries, reduction of the workday to eight hours, the enactment of social security, and various labour reforms. These reforms in the North, under Soviet guidance, seemed to have mirrored the 27-point platform created under the Korean People's Republic. In areas where "people's committees" did not exist, the Soviets sought to create them. And in areas in which the local "people's committees" had an under representation of communists, the Soviets would recreate them "in their own image", so to speak. Indicative of careful planning on the part of the Soviets, the occupational forces brought with them many Soviet Koreans trained to act as an "advisory arm" for the Koreans of the North to help establish a Korean government, a Korean government that would be friendly to Soviet interests. Whereas the American occupation of Korea lacked foresight and a coherent plan, the Soviet occupation was better organised and carefully constructed to safeguard Soviet interests in Korea.

Shortly after coming to power, the regimes of both north and south faced similar challenges. The first challenge was one of attaining legitimacy and the existence of the "other" state was an obstacle in achieving it. Both the Republic of Korea and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea made the claim that their respective regime was the sole legitimate government in the peninsula. Thus, the ROK and the DPRK were in competition for the allegiance of the nation. The North under Kim Il Sung and the South led by Syngman Rhee viewed each other as the main barrier impeding national unification. In view of these diametrically opposed positions, it was little surprise to find both leaders soon denouncing each other and calling for a crusade to crush the illegitimate regime on the other side of the 38th parallel, thereby unifying the country under the rightful government.
Kim Il Sung & the Consolidation of the North

In North Korea, Premier Kim Il Sung took the first steps on the road to socialism. Within a year of the formation of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Kim was able to nationalise nine-tenths of the nation's industrial production. Also within the year, North Korea, with Soviet assistance and advice, embarked on a two-year economic plan. Following Soviet guidance, the emphasis of the first two-year economic plan was placed on heavy industry. The emphasis on heavy industry reflected North Korea's overabundance in factories relative to the Republic of Korea and its inadequacy in agriculture compared with that of the south. By 1950, the economic life of the country was now firmly in the hands of the government.

Central to the North Korean regime was the issue of unification. From the onset, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea considered itself as the sole legitimate government in Korea. The North Korean government let it be known, in no uncertain terms, that it was the intention of their government to extend their rule southward to Pusan. To justify their claim as the sole legal government in Korea, the North Koreans pointed to the demonstrations and unrest in the south as proof that the southern regime did not have the support of the populace (some of the unrest in the south was aided by the North). Kim Il Sung declared in June 1949 that unification was "the most important and immediate task of the party and the people". By the latter part of 1949, Kim had made the fateful decision that he would have to call on the military to unify the nation. The Korean People's Army, was officially formed in 1948, but it had its true origins four years prior to the official founding when the Soviets began training an indigenous military force ostensibly to maintain peace and order. In 1949, the Korean People's Army was augmented by the return of more than 30,000 battle hardened veteran Korean soldiers who had fought alongside the People's Liberation Army. The Korean Peoples Army was further strengthened by the presence of Soviet military advisors among the ranks in addition to the large amounts of military equipment in the form of airplanes, tanks, and artillery. In the end, Kim Il Sung would turn to the Korean Peoples Army to unify Korea.

The Korean war can be divided into three phases.

The first phase began on June 25, 1950 and ended on the day United Nations (U.N) forces thrust into North Korea's territory.

The second phase of the Korean war was essentially the Southern unit's attack and retreat from North Korea.

The last phase of the war consisted of the "see-saw" fighting on the thirty-eighth parallel, stalemate, and negotiation talks.
The Americans in South Korea

The United States military was sent into South Korea with an ineffective plan that was devoid of specifics. Unprepared and inexperienced in Korean affairs, the military set out to create a military occupational government structure without a central plan issued from above. The first course of action in Korea was to refuse to recognise the Korean People’s Republic and its various "people's committees" as the legitimate governing body in Korea. Next, the Americans moved to "resurrect" former officials who had served under the Japanese and incorporated them into the bureaucracy. The use of former pro-Japanese Koreans as officials in the new military government and the National Police alienated the great majority of Koreans. The Americans would later replace many Japanese collaborators with Koreans who were not part of the former colonial governing structure because of heavy pressure emanating from the populace.

The refusal of recognition of the Korean People’s Republic was followed by the outlawing of all the "people's committees" that made up the "vertebrate" of the Korean People’s Republic. This decision by the Americans brought them into direct confrontation with the many labour unions and peasant associations that had backed the "people’s committees". In some areas, violent clashes between the U.S. military (aided by the Korean National Police) and the "people’s committees" occurred. A campaign to eliminate all the "people's committees" in southern Korea was implemented. By 1946, the campaign had succeeded in disbanding most of the "people's committees" in the South. In other areas, the Americans co-operated with the National Police and rightist paramilitary groups to squash labour strikes and political demonstrations. Unjustifiably, the Americans construed all labour strikes or political demonstrations as communist inspired. To be truthful, some indeed were, but a great many labour disputes and demonstrations were genuinely consistent with the demands of the people and were not staged by the communists to bring the nation closer to revolution.

Although the Americans did show many instances of favouritism towards those of the Korean right such as Kim Ku of the Korean Independence Party and Syngman Rhee, the U.S. military government did attempt to bridge the sharpening schism between the right and the left in southern Korea. Before the American military government left Korea, efforts were made to create a coalition between the right and left that would form the basis of a future government. Unfortunately for the Americans, the gap was much too wide to bridge. In December of first year of occupation, the Americans warned that the US military government was "drifting towards a political-economic abyss. Furthermore, the Americans correctly concluded that each passing day of U.S.-Soviet occupation "made the division of Korea more permanent."

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Syngman Rhee & the Consolidation of the South

Syngman Rhee felt the need to consolidate his own power after being elected to the presidency by the National Assembly. Rhee’s hunger for the enlargement of executive authority soon ran into conflict with the legislative body that elected him. By expanding the mandate of the National Security Law (NSL), originally designed to crack down on alleged communist inspired uprising, Rhee used the NSL to suppress any political opposition to his authority, communist or otherwise. To strengthen support of farmers, while at the same time weakening the influence of Korean landlords (many of whom were Rhee’s political enemies within the National Assembly), Rhee pushed through a land reform bill. Those in the National Assembly who objected to the land reform bill and Rhee’s use of Japanese collaborators in his government were subsequently jailed by invoking the NSL. In this way, the National Security Law was used in a variety of ways to eliminate any opposition inside the Republic of Korea. Whether political opposition came from the press or from politicians, no one was excluded from being prosecuted for sedition. In the years between the founding of the Republic of Korea and the Korean War, Rhee used coercion on every opportunity that presented itself to tighten his authoritarian grip over South Korea.

Syngman Rhee called for a “march north” to overthrow the communist regime in P’yanjang and to replace it with that of his own. In the years of 1949 and 1950, Rhee stepped up his rhetoric to a feverish pitch, alarming many Americans who feared that Rhee would provoke the North into action. Despite the intensity of his rhetoric, the Republic of Korea was in no way capable of launching a major military campaign to unify the peninsula. The South Korea Army was inferior to the Korean People’s Army (North) in all categories: in experienced soldiers, tanks, artillery, and airplanes. Rhee and his army were much more bark than bite. Although the Republic of Korea’s Army was sufficient to quell domestic rebellions, it was in no condition to fend off a concerted attack from the North, much less launch a major offensive to unify the peninsula.

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The Korean War 1950-1953

South Korea
Summary

Three advantages
1.

2.

3.

North Korea
Summary

Three Advantages
1.

2.

3.

Conclusion